

De Soto National Memorial

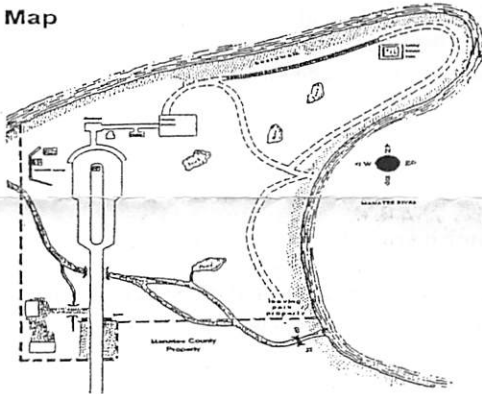
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

De Soto National Memorial
Bradenton, Florida



Self-guided nature trail

Trail Map



This brochure is designed to help you identify significant plants on a self-guided trail walk. Follow the numbered posts along the trail, and you will find corresponding names and descriptions on this sheet.

1) Manatee River, Tampa Bay, and the Gulf of Mexico

As you approach the beach three bodies of water come into view. The Manatee River, a mile wide, reaches from Shaw's point to Sned Island. Emerson Point Park and the largest Native American temple mound in Tampa Bay are located there. Expanding north and westward, Tampa Bay looms before you. On the western horizon you can see the Gulf of Mexico.

2) Mangrove Forest: Red, Black, and White Mangroves

Here you are in a mangrove forest. Mangroves are unique plants that grow in salt water. Mangroves have special adaptations to allow them to grow in the harsh salt-water environment. Mangroves form one of the most productive coastal ecosystems in the world. Mangrove forests form in intertidal areas sheltered from strong wave action. Mangrove leaves provide the basis of the food chain in our bays and estuaries. When the leaves die they fall into the water and rot to become *detritus*. This detritus supports mangrove inhabitants such as tiny crabs and fish. These in turn serve as food sources for other animals higher up the food chain. There are three types of mangrove Florida. The Red, Black, and White mangroves can all be seen from our boardwalk.

3) Epiphytes: Spanish Moss, Ball Moss, and Giant Airplant

An *epiphyte* is a plant that perches on other plants. Near the end of the boardwalk you may notice some gray-green material hanging from the trees; this is Spanish Moss *Tillandsia usneoides*. This is not a true Moss but a bromeliad, or air plant, closely related to the pineapple. Native American women made skirts woven from Spanish Moss for special ceremonies. When you see a plant that seems to be overcome by Spanish moss, there is another problem that the epiphyte is taking advantage of, it does not cause the plant to die. There are two other *Tillandsias* in the park. You will see Ball Moss *Tillandsia recurvata* which appears in ball-like clusters on branches. Also you may notice *Tillandsia fasciculata* which has been commercially exploited in Florida because of its ornamental value.

4) Fish Poison Vine

On the left we see the Fish Poison Vine *Dahlbergia ecastophyllum* used by the Native Americans to catch fish. There is a compound in the roots and bark that paralyzes the fish, but is harmless to the human system. Indians would crush the plant parts, put them in the water and wait for the fish to float to the surface. They would gather them in baskets and carry them back to their village. This procedure is illegal in our modern culture.

5) Spanish Bayonet

Spanish bayonet *Yucca aloifoli*, is named for the deadly sharp points at the end of its leaves. Fibers from this plant were important to the Indians and early settlers, for making into a very strong rope. Also the roots of the plant could be processed and made into soap.

6) Cabbage Palm

The Cabbage Palm *Sabal palmetto* is the official State Tree of Florida. The trunk can be smooth or sometimes covered with old leaf stalk bases called "boots". This tree was very important to native peoples. The fibers of the leaves were collected and twined to make rope and fishing nets. The early settlers of this area harvested the heart of palm, or swamp cabbage as a food source. This was done when the fronds were still at ground level. The heart is the meristem, or growth point of the tree, and when harvested it kills the tree.

6) Strangler Fig

This Strangler fig *Ficus aurea* is using this Cabbage Palm for support. The fleshy fruit of the Strangler fig is an attractive food source for birds. Seeds of the Strangler Fig get deposited in the "boot" of the palm by birds flying above and begin to grow. The roots grow down and the branches grow up, so the strangler fig begins life in the air. The ficus doesn't actually "strangle" a tree (it just looks that way). It does compete with its host for sunlight. The faster growing strangler fig can shade out the photosynthetic process and kill the palm that way.

7) Sea Grape

The Sea Grape *Coccoloba uvifera* is not a true grape; it is given this common name because it grows by the sea and has tasty fruit the size and color of grapes. The pit of the sea grape is much larger than that of a true grape. It is said that DeSoto's men may have used the large leathery leaves for playing cards. They could draw on them and use them over and over again. Fruit of the Sea Grape makes a delicious jelly. Back in the days before strict postal regulations, tourists could write on the sea grape leaf, address it, stamp it and send it through the US Mail as a post card.

8) Buttonwood

There is still a debate on Buttonwoods *Conocarpus erectus* being considered Mangroves. The Buttonwood grows in the Mangrove community. A Mangrove grows in salt water and a Buttonwood is salt tolerant. The hard, heavy, strong wood is water-resistant and was used in naval construction. Buttonwood was prized by Florida fishermen as the best wood for smoking fish.

8) Sea Purslane

Sea Purslane *Sesuvium portulacastrum* is a common, fleshy herb with small magenta flowers. Its stems turn red with age. The leaves of this plant are harvested when growth is new and can be served in salads. They have a salty "pickle" taste, hence the other common name for this plant sea pickle.

9) Florida Privet

This is the Florida Privet *Forestiera segregata*. It produces black fruit around late fall which look like small olives. It is a member of the olive family and is a food source for many songbirds.

10) Jamaican Caper

The Jamaican Caper *Capparis cynophallophora* is a striking shrub or small tree. Lovely white flowers turn pink with age, opening just after dark, and are pollinated by night-flying moths. Flowers open just at dark when moths begin to fly and have a fragrance which can be smelled from a long distance. The Mediterranean caper (another species) flower buds are harvested, pickled and sold as capers.

11) Christmas Berry

In the under story here you will see the rare Florida Christmasberry *Lycium carolinianum*. In the fall this shrub with thick, fleshy leaves is covered with small lavender four-petaled flowers. In December the red berries give the plant its common name of Christmasberry.

12) Necklace Pod

You may see some Necklace Pod *Sophora tomentosa* growing in this area. This woody shrub has compound leaves and bright yellow flowers in spring and summer. The seed pods resemble a beaded necklace. This plant is listed as very rare in the Florida Natural Areas Index (FNAI).